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ARGENTINA: Mounting political
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ARGENTINA

Mounting political violence is emerging as a major headache for President Videla's new government.

Dozens of people have died in clashes between forces of the left and the right since the military take-over on March 24. Urban guerrillas are attacking police and security officials, while rightists are mounting a campaign of reprisals that so far has taken over 20 lives.

In dealing with the renewed warfare, the junta must walk a fine line between seeming to carry out Videla's pledge to keep the antiterrorist campaign within legal bounds and doing what is necessary to suppress the violence.

The activities of the right-wing vigilante groups are particularly troublesome for the junta. It was widely believed that such actions were condoned, or perhaps even inspired, by the Peron administration. The junta can ill afford to acquire the same reputation. Indeed, there is no indication that it has given even tacit approval to the killings of leftists by off-duty police and security officials.

Even so, the exploits of vigilante groups could quickly dissipate the relative good will the public has shown the military government. The junta is aware that it needs all the sympathy it can muster at home and abroad to proceed successfully in critical areas like the economy.

Military advocates of harsh repression view the continuation of left-wing violence as an argument in favor of the tough measures they have proposed all along. The left hopes to provoke precisely such repression, in the belief that the eventual result would be popular repudiation of the military government.

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